THE GROUNDS OF FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

BRIEFLY STATED,

AND

Shewn to be a ſolid Foundation for Peace and Joy unſpeakable.

WITH

An earneſt Recommendation of Catholic Chriſtianity, and the Communion of Saints.

ADDRESSED TO

A candid SOCIETY of CHRISTIANS at the Cloſe of his Miniſtrations amongſt them.

By MICAJAH TOWGOOD.

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THE GROUNDS OF FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, &c.

TO

The UNITED CONGREGATIONS of PROTESTANT DISSENTERS, in the City of EXETER.

MY BELOVED BRETHREN,

WHEN, at this Evening of Life, I look back, and ſurvey the Goodneſs and Mercy which have carried me through more than Sixty Years Service in the chriſtian Sanctuary, and now granted me a

Retreat, with peculiar Marks of Affection and Eſteem, from ſo reſpectable a Society as the United Congregations of Proteſtant Diſſenters in this City, I bow with grateful Adoration! and feel myſelf loſt in Wonder and Praiſe!

The very obliging Manner you have taken, not only to expreſs, but to ſubſtantiate the Expreſſion of your kind Regard, and to tranſmit its Remembrance to our Poſterity, lays me under a Debt, which I ſhall be continually paying to the End of my Life.

And as you have been pleaſed to requeſt ſome Memorial, on my Part, of the important Relation in which I have long ſtood, I know not what better Teſtimony to leave, of my

my unfeigned Concern for your preſent and future everlaſting Felicity, than by calling up to your Review, and ſolemnly conjuring your ſerious Attention to the great Objects preſented in the following Addreſs.

I.

TAKE care that you be well eſtabliſhed in the rational Belief of the chriſtian Revelation; and that you ſee clearly the Grounds on which you acknowledge the divine Miſſion, and Authority of our LORD JESUS CHRIST.

As GOD hath given us Reaſon and Underſtanding, that Image of himſelf in which Man was at firſt form-

ed; ſo it is a reaſonable Service which he expects at our Hands. It is not a blind and enthuſiaſtic, but a rational Faith which Chriſtianity requires: We are always to be in readineſs to give, to every one that aſketh, a Reaſon of the Hope that is in us[a]. Thus only will you be qualified to convince Gainſayers; to refute the Cavils of Sceptics and Unbelievers; and to train up the young Perſons which may be committed to your Care, in the Principles of true Religion; to form them into a Reſemblance to the Character of JESUS CHRIST, and into a Participation of his Spirit, which are abſolutely neceſſary to their paſſing, with any Honour and Happi-

[a] 1 Pet. iii. 15.

neſs,

neſs, through the preſent World; and to their participating of the everlaſting Glory prepared for us in the other.

Beſides; the more clear our Views are, and the more diſtinctly we perceive the Reaſons and Grounds on which our Faith in CHRIST ſtands, the more efficacious will it be to purify our Hearts, to regulate our Lives, to raiſe us above the Snares and Allurements of the World, and to fortify us againſt its Frowns—to give us Peace and Joy amidſt the various Tribulations to which theſe Scenes of Mortality are continually expoſed—and to cauſe us to abound in thoſe Fruits of Righteouſneſs and univerſal Goodneſs in which the Perfection of our Natures, and the Eſſence of Religion entirely conſiſt.

What, then, are the Grounds on which our Faith in CHRIST reſts? Why, do we hope for Salvation and eternal Life, from one who was himſelf put to Death on the Croſs?

To this we reply—

That from the firſt Entrance of SIN and DEATH into the World, we ſee a very wonderful Train both of Prophecies and Promiſes, reaching through a long Series of more than three thouſand Years, which plainly announce a GREAT SAVIOR who was to ariſe, and to deliver Men from the Tyranny of theſe two dreadful Oppreſſors, and to reſtore them to that Liberty and Happineſs and Life which by Tranſgreſſion they had loſt.

In theſe Prophecies and Promiſes, the Perſon, the Birth, the Family,

the Character, the Office, and Employment of this expected Deliverer, his Reception in the World, his Treatment amongſt Men, his Death, his Burial, his Reſurrection from the Dead, and his Aſcenſion into Glory—are ſo circumſtantially foretold, and ſo minutely deſcribed, that when we ſee them all moſt exactly fulfilled in our divine Maſter JESUS CHRIST, we find ourſelves warranted with full Confidence to conclude, that this is HE "that was to come"—the great Deliverer predicted, to whom all the Prophets bore Witneſs, and that we are moſt joyfully to receive him as the promiſed Meſſiah, the CHRIST of GOD.

He was to be in a peculiar Manner the Seed of the Woman—

man [b] — a Deſcendent from ABRAHAM [c] — by the Line of JACOB [d] — of the Tribe of JUDAH [e] — a Prophet like unto MOSES [f], that is, a Lawgiver; and alſo a King, to be born at BETHLEHEM [g] — he was to be introduced by a Meſſenger, who was to go before him in the Spirit and Power of ELIJAH [h] — to make his Appearance among Men without Comelineſs and Form, or any external Pomp to attract their Veneration [i] — to be deſpiſed and rejected of Men; a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Grief [k]. — He was to ride into JERUSALEM on an Aſs,

[b] Gen iii. 15.
[c] xxii. 18.
[d] Numb. xxiv. 17.
[e] Gen. xlix. 10.
[f] Deut. xviii. 15.
[g] Micah v. 2.
[h] Mal. iv. 5.
[i] Iſa. liii. 2.
[k] Iſa. liii. 3.

and

and a Colt, the Fole of an Aſs [l]. —The Meſſiah was to be cut off, but not for himſelf [m] — to be wounded for our Tranſgreſſions, and bruiſed for our Iniquities [n]—his Enemies were to ſhake the Head, and ſhoot out the Lip, and inſult him in his Sufferings [o] — he was to be led like a Lamb to the Slaughter, and as a Sheep before its Shearers is dumb, ſo, it is ſaid, he opened not his Mouth [p]. — They were to give him in his Sufferings Vinegar to drink [q] — to part his Garments amongſt them, and to caſt Lots for his Veſture [r] — he was to be num-

[l] Zech. ix. 9.
[m] Dan. ix 26.
[n] Iſa. liii. 5.
[o] Pſalm xxii. 7, 8.
[p] Iſa. liii. 7.
[q] Pſalm lxix. 21.
[r] Pſalm xxii. 18.

bered

bered with Tranſgreſſors; to make his Exit with the Wicked, and his Grave with the Rich [s] — he was not to ſee Corruption, but to be ſhewn the Path of Life [t] — though his Soul, or Life, was to be made an Offering for Sin, yet he was to prolong his Days, to ſee his Seed, and the Pleaſure of the Lord proſpering in his Hands [u] — he was to dignify the ſecond Temple with his Preſence; and thereby to confer on it a greater Honour, than the former enjoyed, in which the Cloud of Glory dwelt [w]. — Finally, he was to aſcend up on high, to lead Captivity captive, to receive Gifts for Men, yea, for the rebellious alſo,

[s] Iſa. liii. 9, 12.
[t] Pſ. xvi. 10, 11.
[u] Iſa. liii. 10.
[w] Hag. ii. 10.

the

the Gentiles, that the LORD GOD might dwell amongſt them [x].

Now, when we ſee all theſe peculiar, deſcriptive characteriſtic Marks, which were to indicate and point out the expected MESSIAH; and which were not only recorded, but read publicly in the Jewiſh Church, ſome of them above a thouſand, all of them many hundred Years before the Appearance of JESUS upon Earth: When we ſee them all ſo circumſtantially and minutely fulfilled in him, there appears not the leaſt room for a rational Doubt, whether this was the very Savior whom all the Prophets had foreſhewn? And we have the cleareſt Reaſons to affirm, that they never were, nor ever can be, applied juſtly to any other.

[x] Pſalm lxviii. 18.

And

And when, from theſe Prophecies, we proceed to conſider the excellent and divine Doctrine, which he came to preach amongſt Men; the admirable Syſtem of Religion and Morals which his Goſpel contains; far nobler and more perfect than any wiſe Men or Philoſophers of GREECE or of ROME were ever able to produce; ſo rational and ſublime, ſo perfective of our Nature, ſo admirably conducive to the Peace, the good Order and Happineſs of Mankind, and ſo conſonant to that eternal Law of Conſcience, or moral Senſe, which was originally written by the Finger of GOD upon every Man's Heart—and that he not only exemplified in his own ſpotleſs, beneficent Life, the Laws he preſcribed,

but enforced them by Motives of infinite Weight, reſpecting not the preſent only, but alſo the future everlaſting State.

Farther; when we alſo ſee, that GOD himſelf, from Heaven, moſt evidently bore Witneſs to the Divinity of his Miſſion, by the Variety of ſtupendous Miracles which he enabled him to perform; by healing all manner of Diſeaſes, caſting out Demons, giving Sight to the Blind, Speech to the Dumb, and even raiſing the Dead to Life; thus affording, at the ſame Time, a lively Specimen or Sample, as well as a kind of ocular Demonſtration, that HE was the expected Savior, who was to overthrow, and to deſtroy the Power of SIN and of DEATH, and

to

to reſcue Men from the fatal Bondage under which they were oppreſſed. And when we further conſider, that though, according to the divine Counſels, and his own repeated Prediction, the Jews, with wicked Hands, were ſuffered to put him to Death; yet, both Judas who betrayed him, Pilate who condemned him, and the ROMAN CENTURION who had the Charge of his Execution, and ſaw the calm and devout Manner in which he bore his extreme Sufferings, and at laſt breathed his departing Spirit into the Hands of GOD, all bore Witneſs to the Innocence of his Character: Heaven alſo, by the awful Prodigies which attended that great Event, atteſted ſtrongly the ſame; by the preternatural Darkneſs

neſs which for three Hours, at Mid-day, covered the whole Land, by the Earth ſhaken, the Rocks rent, the Graves opening, and the Veil of the Temple torn in twain. — And that as it was not poſſible that Death ſhould hold him captive who came from Heaven to deſtroy it; ſo he roſe again the third Day, as he had frequently foretold; ſhewed himſelf alive to great Numbers of his Diſciples, to more than five hundred Brethren at once; he eat and drank and converſed familiarly with them, for forty Days; they not only ſaw and heard, but felt and handled him; had every poſſible Proof that it was HE, himſelf, not a Spectre or Phantom, but their real beloved Maſter: And at laſt, leading them

out to BETHANY, he talked with them, and bleſſed them; and while he was bleſſing them, in the Preſence of them all, was taken up into Heaven[y], and a Cloud of attending Angels received him out of their Sight[z].

When we calmly conſider all theſe Things, I ſay, we might reſt the Evidence here: That which has been already given, being abundantly ſufficient to juſtify our Faith in JESUS as the promiſed MESSIAH, and to demand our moſt ſerious and attentive Regard to the divine Meſſage he hath brought.

But let it be further obſerved—That, ſome few Days after his Aſcenſion into Heaven, he poured down a Variety of amazing Gifts and Powers upon his feeble, timid, unlearned

[y] Luke xxiv. 50, 51. [z] Acts i. 9.

Diſciples;

Diſciples; whereby they were enabled to ſpeak fluently the Languages of all the ſurrounding Nations; to preach, with great Boldneſs, JESUS and his Reſurrection, before Princes and Councils, and the moſt numerous Aſſemblies; to work great and ſtupendous Miracles, even greater than thoſe which their Maſter himſelf had performed; ſuch as healing all Manner of Diſeaſes, ſtriking with Death, or raiſing the Dead to Life, inſomuch, that when the Multitude of Jews who were aſſembled at the Feaſt of Pentecoſt, from every Nation under Heaven, Greeks, Parthians, Medes, Phrygians—heard them ſpeak, in their own Tongues, the wonderful Works of GOD, they were all amazed: And having the

Goſpel Scheme of Salvation farther explained to them, in that firſt Sermon of PETER's, three thouſand of them were convinced and baptized into the Chriſtian Faith; and ſoon after five thouſand were numbered amongſt their Converts: So ſwiftly ran the Word of God, and mightily prevailed.

And now behold! theſe twelve poor illiterate Fiſhermen, unſupported by any human Power, uninfluenced by any Proſpects of worldly Honour or Gain, oppoſed by all the Learning, Genius, and Wit of the Age; even ſure to draw upon themſelves the Indignation of the Rulers of this World; and to be attacked by the united Rage both of Princes and Prieſts; as the Doctrine they preached

ſubverted

ſubverted the whole Frame of the eſtabliſhed Religions both of Gentiles and Jews.—See them, in the Face of a thouſand Dangers and Diſtreſſes, boldly going forth, atteſting the divine Miſſion and Reſurrection of JESUS, GOD alſo bearing them Witneſs, by Signs, and Wonders, and divers Miracles, and Gifts of the Holy Ghoſt; ſtedfaſtly maintaining the Truth of the Glad-tidings they publiſhed, amidſt the hotteſt Perſecution, and at laſt ſealing it with their Blood!

Finally: Let it be conſidered, that theſe great Tranſactions all paſſed, and their Hiſtory was publiſhed, not in an obſcure Corner, nor in a dark and unenlightened Age and Part of the World, where a cun-

ningly deviſed Impoſture might have ſome Chance of ſucceeding, but, at JERUSALEM, at ROME, in all the Cities of GREECE; at a Time, and in an Age, renowned above all others for Proficiency in Knowledge, for Exquiſiteneſs of Taſte, Improvement in every Branch of Science and Art, called, by way of Eminence, the AUGUSTAN AGE; in this Fulneſs of Time, this moſt curious, inquiſitive, enlightened Period, and Part of the World, did theſe great Events happen; and the Accounts of them contained in the ſacred Books of the New Teſtament, were written by eight of our Lord's intimate Diſciples, who were Eye or Ear-Witneſſes of the Things they record; and who ſuffered and died in Atteſtation of

their Truth.—Had there been any Poſſibility of diſproving the Facts their Writings contain, or of convicting Chriſtianity of any Falſhood or Fraud, all the Men of Power, both in Church and State, and even all of inferior Rank, would have felt themſelves impelled by every Motive of Intereſt, of Pride, of Bigotry, of Prejudice, of religious or party Zeal, to have detected the Impoſture; and, if it had been poſſible, to have cruſhed it in its Birth.

But, of no ſuch Impoſture hath it ever been convicted: It hath ſtood the Teſt of the ſevereſt Scrutiny, and even of fiery Trials, for more than ſeventeen hundred Years: It hath flouriſhed and triumphed over all Oppoſition; and appears to be a

Religion, or Church, founded upon a Rock, againſt which no Powers of Earth or Hell ever have, or ever ſhall be able to prevail.

And when, to all that has been above offered, we add the circumſtantial Fulfilment of ſeveral important Prophecies, delivered alſo by Chriſt himſelf, and his Apoſtles, concerning the impending Deſolation and Deſtruction of JERUSALEM—the Captivity, Diſperſion, and future Fate of the Jews—their being kept a diſtinct People, amidſt all the Shocks and Revolutions which have crumbled and mixed together all the other antient Nations, and ſunk them into one common Maſs — concerning a grand Apoſtaſy which was to ariſe; and a Man of Sin who was to appear;

a ſtrange

a ſtrange and unheard of Power, whoſe Features and Character and unparalleled Tranſactions are minutely deſcribed—all which Predictions, we have ſeen with our own Eyes moſt ſurpriſingly fulfilled, and fulfilling at this very Day.—Such accumulated Weight is given to the Evidence above adduced, that no rational Doubt of the divine Miſſion of CHRIST, we truſt, can poſſibly remain in any truly impartial inquiſitive Mind.

II.

HAVING thus ſeen the Foundation on which our Faith in CHRIST ſtands, let us proceed to take a View of

of the glorious Superſtructure we are called to build upon it.

If it be a faithful ſaying, founded upon proper Evidence, "that CHRIST came into the World to ſave Sinners, it is ſurely moſt worthy of our joyful Acceptation [a]:" And very heinous muſt be the Crime, and very heavy will be the Condemnation of thoſe who ſhall be found to have treated it with Neglect.

It opens to our View a moſt glorious Scene; raiſes us to Hopes high as Heaven, and boundleſs as Eternity. It repreſents to us the ever-bleſſed DEITY in the moſt amiable and attractive, as well as the moſt awful and adorable Light: It aſſures us that GOD is LOVE, perfect LIGHT, in whom there is no Darkneſs or

[a] 1 Tim. i. 15.

Imper-

Imperfection at all [b]: So eſſentially, immutably, eternally GOOD, that in the whole Univerſe of Beings there is none that can be called good in Compariſon with GOD. It invites us to contemplate him; to love, to adore, to truſt, to hope and rejoice in him, as the almighty and moſt merciful FATHER of Mankind; ever preſent and attentive to our minuteſt Concerns, numbering even the Hairs of our Head; pouring a Thouſand undeſerved Bleſſings, every Day of their Lives, upon even the Evil and Unthankful; having an Ear always open to our humble Supplications; more ready to pity and relieve our Diſtreſſes, and to give us every Thing that is really good for us, than the kindeſt Parent upon Earth is to give

[b] 1 John i. 5. iv. 8.

Bread

Bread to his Child when languiſhing for Want.

In this Divine Revelation we ſee this compaſſionate FATHER of Mankind ſwearing by himſelf, that he deſires not our Death — that he would have all Men to be ſaved — that it is not his Will that any ſhould periſh — and that he ſo loved the World of ſinful and apoſtate Men, that, when no other Method was ſo conducive to reſtore them to their loſt Liberty and Life, he ſent his only begotten Son, the moſt dignified Perſon, according to our Apprehenſion, he poſſibly could ſend, and the moſt invaluable Gift he could poſſibly beſtow; this glorious divine Perſon he ſent to reſcue us from our Bondage to SIN and to DEATH,

DEATH, and to raiſe us to greater Glory and Liberty and Life, than that which by Tranſgreſſion we had unhappily loſt.

And now behold — to aſſure his beloved Offspring of theſe Riches of his Goodneſs, and the more effectually to remove all the Doubts and Suſpicions which Guilt naturally creates, and to lead them to Repentance, he hath graciouſly condeſcended to enter into a ſolemn Covenant with all humble and ſincere Penitents, that he will be merciful to their Unrighteouſneſs, and their Sins and Tranſgreſſions he will remember no more—that he will write his Law in their Hearts — that he will be their GOD, and take them for his People. The Promiſes of this Covenant

venant are juſtly ſaid to be exceeding precious and great; exalting us to be Partakers of a Nature that is divine: They contain a Grant of immenſe Bleſſings, far greater than we can at preſent conceive. This moſt gracious Covenant GOD, in infinite Mercy, hath been pleaſed to ratify and confirm by the Death, the Reſurrection, and the Aſſumption into Glory of JESUS the Mediator, his only begotten Son, who not only came from Heaven to publiſh it to Mankind, but died to atteſt its Truth, and to put away Sin by the Sacrifice of himſelf: As a Reward of this his voluntary Obedience unto Death, he is exalted to ſupreme Power over all created Beings, both in Heaven and Earth; and is thus veſted

veſted with full Authority to carry all its kind Deſigns into full Execution. So that now, with the ſtrongeſt Confidence of Hope, we may truſt and rejoice in him as a complete and all-ſufficient Savior, able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all our Thoughts.

But theſe Sufferings of the Mediator we are always to conſider, not as the primary and moving Cauſe of GOD's being propitious to us, and willing to be reconciled, but as the Manner only, or the Medium, in which he was pleaſed to ſhew himſelf propitious. Antecedent to the Death of CHRIST, he was gracious, and merciful, and ready to forgive. "For GOD ſo loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son

Son[c]"—and "GOD, who is rich in Mercy, for the great Love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in Sin, hath quickened us together with CHRIST[d]." And "all Things are of GOD, who hath reconciled us to himſelf by JESUS CHRIST[e]." But, for infinitely wiſe Reaſons, fully known only to himſelf, but ſome of which we clearly ſee, he choſe to diſpenſe his Pardons only by the Hands, and as a Reward of the meritorious Sufferings of one of the human Race; that as "by Man came Death, ſo by Man alſo ſhould come the Reſurrection of the Dead[f]."

[c] John iii. 16.
[d] Eph. ii. 5.
[e] 2 Cor. v. 18.
[f] 1 Cor. xv. 21.

The

The great Mediator betwixt GOD and Man is the Man CHRIST JESUS[g]. Him hath God exalted, at his own Right Hand, to be a Prince and a Savior; to diſpenſe his Bleſſings and Favours, and to fulfil all the great Purpoſes of his tranſcendent Mercy and Love to the Redeemed from amongſt Men. "For his Suffering and Death he was crowned with this Honour[h];" and "BECAUSE he humbled himſelf," and in Submiſſion to the Will of GOD, and in Love to Mankind, "became obedient to Death, even the Death of the Croſs; THEREFORE GOD alſo hath highly exalted him, and given him a Name above every Name[i]."

[g] 1 Tim. ii. 5. [h] Heb. ii. 9.
[i] Phil. ii. 8, 9.

So that now "all Power both in Heaven and Earth is put into his Hands [k]; the Father judgeth no Man, but hath committed all Judgment to the Son [l];" and hath made him Head and Lord over all Things for his Church [m]." With what grateful Aſtoniſhment, Chriſtians, ſhould we contemplate and adore this amazing Scheme of Salvation.

This exalted Son of GOD, who had a Glory with the Father before the World was [n], and probably was that Brightneſs of his Glory, that ANGEL of his Preſence, which appeared to MOSES in the Buſh, and which led the Iſraelites through the Wilderneſs, and dwelt amongſt them

[k] Matt. xxviii. 18. [l] John v. 22, 23.
[m] Eph. i. 22. [n] John xvii. 5.

in

in the Cloud of Glory, and carried them triumphant through all Difficulties and Dangers to the peaceful Poſſeſſion of the promiſed Land; — this exalted Son of GOD, I ſay, in his infinite Compaſſion, humbled himſelf into a Son of Man; laid aſide that Glory in which he before dwelt, and in Obedience to the Father's Will, aſſumed the Body which he had prepared him *, became a Partaker of Fleſh and Blood, dwelt in a frail Body as we at preſent do; was tempted in all Things as we at preſent are, only without Sin; was not aſhamed to call us Brethren.

And now this Friend, this Brother, faithful, affectionate, and tenderly concerned for us, far beyond all who ever ſuſtained theſe Cha-

* Heb. x. 5. ii. 14, 17. iv. 15.

racters amongſt Men, is entered for us, into the higheſt Heavens; is ſet down at the Right Hand of the eternal Majeſty there[p]: And the great End of this his Exaltation, is to tranſact our Affairs; to make Interceſſion, and to prepare a Place for us; to bleſs us, by turning us every one from his Sins; and to preſide over all Things for our final and everlaſting Good.

It is a principal and important Part both of the Duty and the Delight of every ſincere Chriſtian, thus to look to JESUS, the great Author and Finiſher of our Faith[q]; and as we believe in GOD, to believe alſo in him; to exult in the Conſideration, that we have now an High-prieſt entered for us into Heaven, and

[p] Heb. vi. 20. viii. 1. ix. 24. [q] Heb. xii. 2.

there poſſeſſed of all Power; in whom it hath pleaſed the Father that all Fulneſs ſhould dwell, even the Fulneſs of the Godhead, Wiſdom, Power, Goodneſs, Mercy, reſiding in him bodily, that is, ſubſtantially, permanently; that from this Fulneſs we might receive a rich Supply of Grace, according as the ſeveral Exigencies of our State may require: We are to apply to and believe in him, as one who experimentally knows all the Pains and Temptations, the Weakneſſes and the Wants to which we are now ſubject; and therefore to one every Way qualified to pity and to help us, and to carry on the grand Deſigns of GOD's Mercy towards us, till he hath brought us to that Conſummation

of Glory and Happineſs which the eternal Father hath prepared for us from the Foundation of the World.

To ſtrengthen this Faith, and animate this Hope, let us proceed

III.

TO contemplate a little more diſtinctly what the Bleſſings and Grants are, contained in this new Covenant, of which JESUS is the Mediator.

It hath Heights and Depths, as the Apoſtle obſerves, which far exceed the Reach of the moſt comprehenſive human Mind; moſt juſtly, therefore, ſtyled, "GOD's unſpeakable Gift[r];" and "the unſearchable Riches of CHRIST[s]." It in-

[r] 2 Cor. ix. 15. [s] Eph. iii. 8, 18.

ſures

ſures a full Pardon of all their paſt Offences; that all Manner of Sin and Blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven to all who truly repent, and who ſo believe in JESUS CHRIST as to ſubmit to his Authority, and govern themſelves by his Laws. None of their Tranſgreſſions ſhall be remembered againſt them; they are juſtified freely through Grace; they are received into the divine Family and Favour again, with the ſame tender Affection as if they never had offended:—Received, not in the Character of Servants only, or as Friends, but as Children of the almighty Father, whom he joyfully embraces, and reſtores to all that Dignity and Rank and Riches in his Family, which by Tranſgreſſion they had loſt.

"What Manner of Love is this," with grateful Tranſport may we ſay, "which the Father hath beſtowed upon us, that we ſhould be called the Sons of GOD [t]." When our Lord was riſen from the Dead, he ſends his Diſciples this joyful Salutation, "I aſcend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God [u]." And when ſome told him that his Mother and Brethren wanted to ſpeak with him, "he ſtretched forth his Hand towards his Diſciples, and ſaid, Behold my Mother and my Brethren. For whoſoever ſhall do the Will of my Father who is in Heaven, the ſame is my Brother, and Siſter,

[t] 1 John iii. 1. [u] John xx. 17.

and

and Mother[x]:" And, "becauſe ye are Sons," the Apoſtle ſays, that is, becauſe God hath called you to this high Honour, hath intended to diſplay the exceeding Riches of his Grace in raiſing you to this exalted Rank in his intelligent Creation; he hath "therefore ſent forth the Spirit of his Son into your Hearts[y]." It is as the "Firſt-born among many Brethren[z]," that our Lord is entered into his Kingdom, and is ſet down with his Father upon his Throne; but all his faithful Followers being alſo Children and Heirs of GOD, Joint-Heirs with CHRIST[a], ſhall aſcend after him, and ſit down with him in his Throne, and reign with him in that Kingdom which

[x] Matt. xii. 49. [y] Galat. iv. 6.
[z] Rom. viii. 29. [a] Rom. viii. 17. Rev. iii. 21.

the

the eternal Father hath prepared from the Foundation of the World.

Behold! and adore! the unſearchable Depths of divine Counſel and Mercy in this Scheme of our Redemption! Man was at firſt made a little lower than the Angels, and had Dominion given him only over the inferior and brute Creation; but, in this new Conſtitution or Diſpenſation of Things, Man we ſee crowned with far ſuperior Honour: He is raiſed to a Dominion over all the Principalities and Powers of the upper Worlds [b]: The great Mediator, the Man CHRIST JESUS, is made higher than all the Angels [c]; all the various Ranks of theſe celeſtial Beings worſhip and bow before him [d]. And are not all faithful Chriſtians, his Brethren and

[b] Eph. i. 21—23. [c] 1 Pet. iii. 21.
[d] Heb. i. 6. Rev. v. 10—14.

Joint-

Joint-Heirs, to ſhare with him in this Honour, and partake of this Glory[e]? "To which of the Angels ſaid GOD at any Time, Thou art my Son—are they not all miniſtering Spirits, waiting around the Throne, ſent forth to miniſter to the Heirs of Salvation[f]?" But behold, to us Liberty is given to become the Sons of GOD, brethren of JESUS CHRIST, Joint-Heirs in his Kingdom; he hath called and raiſed us to ſit with him in his Throne, to reign with him as Kings, and to judge Angels[g]! Let us bow down in grateful Wonder, and ſay, "Even ſo, holy Father, for ſo it ſeemed good in thy Sight[h]!"

"O the Depth of the Riches both of the Wiſdom and Mercy of GOD! how unſearchable are his Counſels,

[e] 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3. [f] Heb. i. 5, 14.
[g] Rev. iii. 21. Eph. ii. 5 [h] Matt. xi. 26.

and his Thoughts of Love to our fallen Race, paſt finding out[i]!" He hath ſnared the Deceiver in the Work of his own Hands! We are raiſed, even by our Fall! What was meant for our Ruin, is made to turn to our unſpeakable and everlaſting Salvation. Where Sin hath abounded, Grace hath taken Occaſion much more to abound[k]. That DEATH, by which the Tempter meant to have deſtroyed the human Race, is, by the Wiſdom and Grace of GOD, made the Inſtrument, or Means of opening to us the Gates of a bleſſed IMMORTALITY, and of introducing us into a Paradiſe incomparably more glorious than that which was then loſt.

"Bleſſed be the GOD and Father of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, who ac-

[i] Rom. xi. 33. [k] Rom. v. 17, 20.

cording

cording to his abundant Mercy hath begotten us again to a lively Hope, by the Reſurrection of JESUS CHRIST from the Dead, to an Inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reſerved in Heaven for us[l]!"

But though as Children of GOD and Brethren of JESUS CHRIST, we are Heirs and Expectants of ſo glorious an Inheritance, we are to conſider ourſelves at preſent as Children under Age, in a State of Diſcipline and Preparation, to be formed into a Meetneſs for thoſe high Dignities and Honours and Offices of Truſt, under GOD the Supreme Governor, to which as Kings and Prieſts we are to be advanced in the future State[m].

[l] 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. [m] Rev. i. 5, 6. ii. 10. 26, 27. v. 10. xx. 4, 5, 6.

Let

Let it therefore never be forgotten, Chriſtians, that Patience and Self-denial, Meekneſs, Humility, an abſolute Reſignation and Submiſſion to the Will of Heaven under the ſevereſt Diſpenſations, and an Heart warmed with an unfeigned Love to GOD, to our bleſſed Savior, and to all our Fellow-men, are indiſpenſably neceſſary, both to denominate us Heirs of this heavenly Inheritance, and to qualify and make us meet, or even capable of it's Poſſeſſion. There can be no Conqueſt, if there is no Conflict; no Patience, if no Suffering; no Virtue, if no Difficulty to encounter and to overcome; no Forgiveneſs, if no Injuries. The Captain of our Salvation was made perfect by Sufferings [n]; it was by the Croſs

[n] Heb. ii. 10.

that

that he aſcended to the Poſſeſſion of the Crown; and through many Tribulations the moſt illuſtrious of thoſe happy Spirits who ſit neareſt to his Throne, attained thoſe Stations of ſuperior Dignity there. Let us not think it ſtrange then, if, though admitted to the high Honour of being Children of GOD, we are nevertheleſs called to ſuffer ſevere Conflicts, Poverty, Pain, Perſecution, Reproach, and Diſtreſſes of various Kinds, in our Paſſage through Life. What Son is there, whom the Father chaſtens not? Theſe Trials of our Faith, if patiently and well borne, will be found to our everlaſting Honour, when the Day of Recompence ſhall ſhortly come; of infinitely more value than any Gold or Riches this World could give. Theſe light

Afflictions,

Afflictions, which are but for a few Months, are not worthy to be compared with the magnificent Reward which awaits us beyond the Grave; where every Affliction ſuſtained according to the Will of GOD, will ſurely work out for us a far more exceeding and an eternal Weight of Glory [o].

Animated by theſe Hopes, let us ſummon all the Strength and Vigour of our Minds to ſtand firm in the Day of Trial; to keep always a good Conſcience, whatever worldly Loſs or Suffering we ſuſtain. Continue faithful to the Death, and you will receive a Crown of Life [p], which will infinitely repay any Sufferings or Self-denials to which your Duty may

[o] Rom. viii. 17, 18. 2 Cor. iv. 17.
[p] Rev. ii. 10.

poſſibly

poſſibly expoſe you in this probationary State.

Not that we are to imagine, that a Courſe of Piety and Obedience to the Laws of CHRIST hath any natural Tendency, either to leſſen the Pleaſures, or to multiply or ſharpen the Evils of Life, but quite the Reverſe; its Ways are Ways of Pleaſantneſs, and its Paths are thoſe of Peace. Were there no future State, either of Puniſhment or Reward, yet to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly, in this preſent World, agreeable to the Laws which Chriſtianity preſcribes, would, in the ordinary Courſe of Things, carry us through Life with more Honour and Pleaſure; and not only more ſweeten, but more lengthen its Enjoyments, than a

Courſe of Folly and Sin. For Godlineſs, or true Religion, is profitable unto all Things, having Promiſe of the Life that now is, as well as of that which is to come[q]. The Fruit of Righteouſneſs is Peace; and a good Conſcience will prove to every Man that enjoys it, a continual Feaſt.

Bleſſed is the Man whoſe Heart is fixed, truſting in GOD! He ſhall not, he need not, be afraid of evil Tidings. Almighty Power is his Guardian, unerring Wiſdom his Guide, the GOD of all Conſolation and Father of Mercies, is his Father and Portion, and has promiſed to care for him, and to make every Event to work together for his Good; ſo that now he can exhibit to the whole intelligent Creation, to An-

[q] 1 Tim. iv. 8.

gels

gels as well as Men, the glorious Spectacle of one rejoicing in Tribulation, and in all Things giving Thanks. He has a Peace and a Joy, arising from his Faith in an unseen, almighty Savior, entered for him into the Heavens; a Peace which passeth all Understanding; which as the World can never give, so neither can it take away; a Joy, as the Apostle expresses it, unspeakable and full of Glory[r].

IV.

AND now, Brethren, having so glorious a Prospect opened to our View;—such a Gift of immense Value offered to our Acceptance;—God forbid that we should receive this

[r] 1 Pet. i. 8.

ineſtimable Grace in vain! For how ſhall we eſcape, if we ſhall be found[r] to have neglected ſo great Salvation! Let us keep it ever upon our Minds, that this ſame JESUS, who once ſuffered upon Earth, and aſcended into Heaven, and who now lives and reigns there for the Comfort and Support of all who unfeignedly commit themſelves to him, will aſſuredly come down again upon this Earth, in Glory and great Power, to complete the grand Scheme of their everlaſting Redemption.

He will ſurely come down again, not only in his own Glory, but in the Glory of his Father, with all his holy Angels[t]; with theſe Eyes we ſhall ſee him, and in theſe Perſons we ſhall ſtand before him, to be

[r] Heb. ii. 3. [t] Luke ix. 26.

judged,

judged, and to receive a Recompence according to our preſent Works.

If by a faithful conſcientious Diſcharge of our Duty in the ſeveral Stations and Relations in which his Providence hath placed us, we have ſincerely endeavoured to approve ourſelves to him.—If his Eye, which penetrates the Receſſes of all Hearts, and ſees the numerous Defects which have attended our beſt Services, ſees alſo that theſe Defects have been the real Grief of our Souls; and that the general Temper of our Minds, and Courſe of our Lives, have been governed by a religious Regard to his Laws—We may, then, look forward with humble Joy and Confidence to his appearing, knowing that the Judge is our Friend; that he will then come

to put an everlaſting End to the Reign of SIN and of DEATH; to aboliſh the Curſe; to bring in everlaſting Righteouſneſs; to create all Things anew; to raiſe the Bodies of his Servants from their mouldering Duſt, and to faſhion them like to his own glorious, reſplendent Body; to exhibit them to the View of the whole aſſembled World, to Angels as well as Men, as the Children of GOD, Heirs of his everlaſting Kingdom; and they ſhall ſhine as the Sun in the Firmament above: "For when CHRIST who is our Life ſhall appear, we ſhall be like him, for we ſhall ſee him as he is;" the Sight will be tranſforming, and we ſhall appear with him in Glory.

What

What awful Scenes are theſe! how infinitely deſerving our deepeſt, moſt ſerious, and frequent Attention! and how juſtly do they demand every poſſible Exertion that we be found prepared for that great Event, able to ſtand in that Judgment, and counted worthy to be admitted into that Congregation of the Righteous! Whether we ſhall, or ſhall not, my Brethren, depends upon our preſent Conduct. It is now, by the Grace of GOD, put into our Power, and preſented to our Choice. Behold, Life and Death are now ſet before us. Attend to the gracious Calls which GOD hath ſent us from Heaven by his Son JESUS CHRIST. Open and prepare your Hearts moſt thankfully to receive, and faithfully to obey them. Chuſe Life—a Life

of Piety and Virtue; which is the only true Life of a rational and immortal Being, that you may be happy, and live for ever.—For why will you die?

V.

I ſee and I adore the rich Mercy of GOD, an alarmed Penitent may ſay, in preſenting to my View ſo glorious a Prize, and calling me by his Goſpel to riſe and poſſeſs it. But I feel my own Weakneſs; a moral Diſorder ſpread through my whole Frame; the Strength of corrupt Appetites; the force of evil Habits; and the Frailty of many a ſtrong and vigorous Reſolution, which I have often made, and as often broke. Wretched

Man

Man that I am! who ſhall deliver me from this feeble, enthralled State?

But if GOD, who ſearcheth the Heart, ſees it to be the real Wiſh and Deſire of our Souls to be ſet free from this fatal Bondage, and that we are ſincerely diſpoſed to exert faithfully the feeble Powers we ſtill have to obtain this Deliverance, let us not be diſcouraged; we are Priſoners of Hope; there is Liberty for ſuch Captives; one mighty to ſave, hath undertaken their Releaſe; all Power is given him, both in Heaven and Earth, to enable him to effect it.

The miraculous Cures which our LORD wrought upon diſeaſed Bodies, were a Kind of Pledges as well as Proofs of his being the great Phyſician appointed by GOD to heal the

Vices

Vices of the Mind, and to cure diſtempered Souls. He, who when upon Earth, had Power to forgive all manner of Sin, and to annihilate and remove all its penal Effects, has much more the ſame Power now that he is exalted to ſupreme Dominion in Heaven.

If, in his State of Humiliation, we ſee him ſpeaking Tempeſts into a Calm, giving Sight to the Blind, cleanſing leprous Bodies, caſting out Demons, and raiſing the Dead to Life; with full Aſſurance we conclude, that being now entered into his Glory, and conſtituted Head over all Things for his Church, he can calm our tumultuous Paſſions, open the Eyes of our Underſtanding, ſet right the diſordered Appetites and

Powers

Powers of our Frame, cleanſe us from all Taints of moral Pollution, and raiſe us from the Death of Sin to a Life of Righteouſneſs and of GOD; and thus form us to a Meetneſs for the exalted Pleaſures and Employments prepared by the eternal Father from the Foundation of the World.

At our firſt Entrance into the Chriſtian Church, we are baptized, you know, into the Name, not of the Father and of the Son only, but alſo into that of the Holy Ghoſt. This Spirit is the great Agent or Miniſter under CHRIST, by whoſe Operation the Bleſſings of the New Covenant are imparted to his faithful Followers, and the grand Scheme of our Redemption is carried on to Perfection. When GOD promiſed

that

that "in bleſſing he would bleſs ABRAHAM, that is, would exceedingly bleſs him, and that in his Seed all Nations of the Earth ſhould be bleſſed[u]:"—the Scriptures inform us, that THE SPIRIT, which we receive under the Chriſtian Diſpenſation, is the Completion of thoſe Bleſſings, and comprehends every good Thing which we can ever want or deſire, to render us happy:—"that the Bleſſing of ABRAHAM might come upon the Gentiles through JESUS CHRIST, that we might receive the Promiſe of the SPIRIT by Faith[w]."

When our LORD left the World, he conſoled his Diſciples by the Aſſurance, that he would not leave

[u] Gen. xxii. 17, 18. Heb. vi. 13—20.

[w] Matt. vii. 11. Luke xi. 13. Gal. iii. 14.

them

them comfortleſs, but would ſend them another Comforter, who would abundantly ſupply his Abſence, and would abide with them continually, to carry on the great Deſigns of GOD's Mercy towards them; and that by THIS HIS AGENT OR MINISTER, the Angel of his Preſence, "he would be with them always, even to the End of the World [x]." The kind Offices HE performs for us, are thoſe of a Monitor and Inſtructor, to ſtrengthen and aſſiſt our intellectual and moral Powers, to enlighten our Underſtandings, and to lead us into all needful Truth; HE is promiſed to help our Infirmities, to ſanctify and renew us in the Temper of our Minds, to ſet right the Inclinations and Bent of our Souls, that we may favour

[x] Matt. xxviii. 20.

the

the Things of GOD; to be in us a Spirit of Regeneration—a kind of new Principle of Life, an incorruptible Seed, by which we are born of GOD, introduced, as it were, into a new World, have new Connexions and Relations, new Views and Affections, new Objects of our Cares, Desires, and Pursuits, new Hopes and Fears.

HE is a Spirit of Light and Life and Joy and Peace in every prepared and well-disposed Heart, in which HE comes down and takes up his abode, and dwells and walks with it through the Pilgrimage of Life; and when that is finished, HE sends some kind Angels to convoy the departing Spirit to those Mansions in the Father's House, which their Lord is gone before

before to prepare for their Reception [y].

The Inſtrument or Means by which HE principally performs theſe important Offices for us, is that Record of divine Things, the Scriptures of Truth, which, under his Influence, the Apoſtles and Prophets were directed to write, and to tranſmit to all future Ages, which contain the Doctrines, the Precepts, the Motives, the Hiſtories and Examples which are neceſſary to inſtruct and to build us up in all righteous and holy Conduct, and to make us perfect, thoroughly furniſhed unto every good Work.

It is called the Word of Reconciliation, the Word of Faith, the Word of Truth, the Word of Life; and

[y] John xiv. 2, 3.

as

as the material World was originally formed by the Word of GOD[z]; ſo this ſpiritual or new Creation, or Renovation of the moral World, which the Goſpel effects, is produced under the Influence of this Word, or by a Faith in the great Truths which theſe Scriptures reveal. And that it may accompliſh this bleſſed Purpoſe through all the ſucceſſive Ages and Revolutions of Mankind, during our Lord's perſonal Abſence from the Church, this HOLY SPIRIT, as his Vicegerent, or Prime-Miniſter in it, calls forth a Succeſſion of Paſtors and Teachers, whom HE qualifies and aſſiſts to explain and inculcate the great Doctrines of his Religion; to warn every Man, and to teach every Man in all Wiſdom;

[z] Heb. xi. 3.

to

to build them up in their moſt holy Faith, and to preſent every Man perfect in CHRIST JESUS at laſt[a].

This Spirit having immediate Acceſs to all the ſecret Springs of Action, and the Powers of the human Soul, the external Miniſtration of the great Truths of the Goſpel, we have Reaſon to believe, is generally attended with his internal Influences upon every attentive and well-diſpoſed Mind; ſuch as are ſufficient to reclaim it from the Paths of Vice, and to bring it into a willing, unfeigned Subjection to the Authority of CHRIST. But HE deals with us as with reaſonable and moral Agents; HE may, by our perverſeneſs, be reſiſted and grieved; we may obſtinately ſhut our Eyes, and turn

[a] Col. i. 28.

away our Ears, from Him that ſpeaks to us from Heaven, and harden our Hearts againſt all the good Impreſſions which, both by the Word from without, and by the ſilent Remonſtrances of Conſcience from within, this kind divine Monitor is continually ſtriving to fix in our Breaſts: But it is at our infinite Peril, if we thus wilfully thruſt from us this Word of Life, and reject theſe Counſels of divine Mercy againſt ourſelves!

Read, therefore, and ponder, Chriſtians, with great Diligence and Attention theſe invaluable Scriptures. They are an ineſtimable Treaſure of Wiſdom and Knowledge; they open to us the unſearchable Riches of GOD's Mercy in our Redemption by CHRIST. In them alone we have both

both the Promiſe, and the ſure Way of obtaining ETERNAL LIFE. Whether, therefore, we conſider them as the great Charter under which we hold our Title to all the Privileges and Honours of Citizens of Zion, the heavenly Jeruſalem, that City of the living GOD, for which ABRAHAM and the Patriarchs ſtedfaſtly looked. —Or whether we conſider them as the laſt Teſtament or Grant of the almighty Father in Heaven, in which he hath bequeathed to us a glorious Inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled; and hath conſtituted us Joint-Heirs with JESUS his beloved Son, whom he hath appointed Heir of all Things. — Or, finally, whether we conſider theſe ſacred Writings as a Code of divine Laws, by which, as

Subjects of the Messiah's Kingdom, our Life and Manners and Habits are to be formed, so as not only to gain us Admittance into, but Rank and Elevation in it; a Light to guide our Feet into the Paths of universal Righteousness, which alone can lead us to eternal Life.—Upon all these Accounts, we are most highly concerned to make these sacred Writings the Subject of our most serious and delightful Contemplation, and earnestly to pray, that the same Spirit which indited, may help us to understand them, and to draw from them that Light and Strength and Joy and Peace which they were intended to convey to every prepared and well-disposed Mind

And as from the Foundation of the World, long before the Commencement of the Jewiſh Diſpenſation, GOD, the Author of our Beings, and Giver of every Power and Bleſſing we enjoy, has ſanctified and ſet apart one Day in ſeven, and commanded it to be devoted to his more immediate Service, and to the Purpoſes of Religion; ſo it moſt highly concerns us to pay a conſcientious and ſacred Regard to the Inſtitution of the SABBATH. An Inſtitution moſt wiſely and mercifully deſigned to withdraw our Minds from too cloſe an Attachment to this tranſitory World, out of which we are daily dying, and to engage us to look forward to that inviſible eternal World, into which we are daily

paſſing, to acquaint ourſelves with it, to prepare ourſelves for it, to attempt and to begin its noble Exerciſes and Employments, to anticipate its Pleaſures, and to acquire that Temper and thoſe Habits of Mind, which are neceſſary to make us meet to join the bleſſed Society of adoring Angels and Saints in the happy Regions above.

Theſe are ſome of the very kind and beneficent Ends, for which the GOD of our Lives, in whoſe Hands our Breath is, and whoſe are all our Ways, hath reſerved, as ſacred to himſelf, one Day in ſeven, and commanded it to be kept as an holy Sabbath to himſelf. On this, therefore, we are to give ourſelves more particularly to read and ſearch the Scrip-

Scriptures, and to attend the various Offices and Miniſtrations in the Church, which are appointed to explain them, and to inculcate the great Truths and Doctrines they contain with the greater Force upon our Minds.

Under every Diſpenſation and Form of Religion, whether Jewiſh or Chriſtian, the Solemnity of that Charge will deeply impreſs every ſerious Mind—"Ye ſhall keep my Sabbaths, and reverence my Sanctuary; I am the LORD [b]."

But, beſides the public Homage which we are to pay the almighty Sovereign in the Aſſemblies of his People, on that which is called the Lord's Day, there is alſo a Tribute

[b] Levit. xix. 30.

of domeſtic Worſhip which every chriſtian Family ought daily to offer up, imploring the divine Preſence to come down and to dwell with it; to preſide over and perfect it; to proſper and bleſs it in all its lawful Purſuits; ever remembering, that it is his Bleſſing only that maketh rich, and addeth no Sorrow with it[c]; and that unleſs the LORD keeps the City, the Watchmen wake in vain[d]. For all our domeſtic Harmony and Plenty and Health and Peace we entirely depend upon his all-pervading SPIRIT, which governs all Hearts, preſides over all, even our minuteſt Concerns; without whom not a Sparrow falls to the Ground: So that "if He giveth Peace, who then can

[c] Prov. x. 22. [d] Pſal. cxxvii. 1.

cauſe

cauſe Trouble? but if he hideth his Face, who then can behold him[e]?"

The Tabernacle of GOD, let us remember and rejoice, is ſtill with Men upon Earth, and he will dwell and walk with them. The Habitations of the Righteous he delights to make his abode. Happy is that Family which is honoured with the Preſence of ſo divine a Gueſt! Though it may not always bring with it Riches and Health, and a Flow of worldly Proſperity, becauſe theſe Things HE may ſee would prove Snares, and injurious to their real and beſt Intereſts; it ſecures to them Bleſſings of infinitely greater Worth, that Peace of GOD which paſſeth all Underſtanding[f], the Teſtimony of an approving Conſcience, an humble,

[e] Job xxxiv. 29. [f] Phil. iv. 7.

joyful

joyful Hope, that all its Concerns ſhall be ſo overruled by the great Father of the univerſal Family, as ſhall moſt effectually promote its final everlaſting benefit, and form it to a Meetneſs for a Manſion of ſuperior Glory in the Habitations above.

Remember the very honourable Teſtimony which GOD gave to ABRAHAM our Father, and how high his domeſtic Piety raiſed him in the divine Eſteem, "I know ABRAHAM, that he will command his Children and his Houſhold after him, to keep the Commandment of the LORD, to do Juſtice and Judgment, that the LORD may bring upon ABRAHAM the good Things which he hath ſpoken of him[g];" that is, all the great Bleſſings which he had promiſed to him,

[g] Gen. xviii. 19.

and

and to his Seed after him, in their ſucceſſive Generations, to the lateſt Poſterity.

To our family Devotions, let thoſe alſo of the Cloſet never fail to be added; where, as our Saviour directs, we retire from the World, and pour our Souls in humble Adoration, Thankſgivings, and Prayers to our almighty Father in ſecret[h]. When no Eye but his ſees us, and all Reſtraints from ſurrounding Objects and Avocations being removed, we proſtrate ourſelves before the Throne of divine Mercy, to maintain a ſacred Intercourſe with the great Parent of our Spirits; to ſpread our Complaints, to pour out our Requeſts, to confeſs before him our Sins, and implore their Forgiveneſs;

[h] Matth. vi. 6.

to

to renew our ſolemn Vows of better Obedience; to adore his ſtupendous Patience and Long-Suffering towards us; and to praiſe him for the many great and ineſtimable Favours he is continually pouring down upon us, notwithſtanding our perverſe and ungrateful Returns.—For theſe Exerciſes of Devotion, a truly enlightened Mind will delight frequently to retire from the buſy Scenes of Life, to acquaint itſelf with GOD, and with that World of Spirits, from which its Origin is derived, and to which it is ſoon to return [1]. The human Soul, let us never forget, is the Offſpring of the DEITY; was made in his Image, and deſigned for his Converſe: In this Intercourſe and Communion with GOD its almighty

[1] Eccleſ. xii. 7.

Parent,

Parent, ſome of its ſublimeſt Pleaſures muſt neceſſarily conſiſt. "Seek the LORD and his Strength; therefore, ſeek his Face for evermore [k]." He is never far from any of us; he is ever near and around us; let us delight ourſelves with the Thought, that as he is infinitely more our FATHER than any Parent of our Fleſh, ſo he is infinitely more able, as well as more willing, to bleſs us, and to give us every good Thing, than any Parent upon Earth is to the Child who is the Object of his tendereſt Regard.

Such, indeed, is the preſent Imperfection of our Nature, that no Man is at all Times alike diſpoſed, or even capable, from the Reſources of his own Mind, to maintain this

[k] Pſalm cv. 4.

delight-

delightful Intercourſe with the DEITY by Meditation and Prayer. In that Caſe he will find himſelf much helped by ſome devotional Compoſitions, or Forms of Prayer and Thankſgiving, with a rich Variety of which the Public abounds.

But it is ever carefully to be remembered, that no Fervor, nor Frequency, nor Punctuality of theſe Devotions, whether public or private, are of any Account in the Sight of GOD, or Profit to ourſelves, any farther than they elevate and transform the Mind into a Reſemblance of the GOD we worſhip, and "make us holy as he is holy [1]." By thus contemplating and adoring the Perfections of the DEITY, we are to preſerve continually upon our Minds

[1] 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

a reverential Awe of him; to kindle and keep alive a Flame of unfeigned Gratitude, Veneration, and Love to him; a ſtrong Senſe of his Preſence with us, and of his Providence and Dominion over us; an habitual Care to pleaſe, and religious dread of offending him.

And as the nobleſt Act of Worſhip we can pay the ever-bleſſed DEITY is to imitate his Perfections, let it ever be the grand Ambition and Care of our Lives to tranſcribe The Glories of the divine Character into our own; that beholding, as with open Face, the Glory of GOD ſhining forth in the Perſon and Character of CHRIST[m], who was "GOD manifeſt in the Fleſh, we may be changed into the ſame Image; may

[m] 2 Cor. iii. 17. iv. 4.

become

become kind and condeſcending, patient and forbearing, obedient to GOD, and benevolent to Men, as CHRIST our Lord was: The more we are transformed into this Likeneſs to our bleſſed Lord, in the Scenes of our preſent Diſcipline and Probation upon Earth, the higher ſhall we be advanced, and the nearer ſit to the Throne of his Glory, and the more largely participate of the ſublime and everlaſting Pleaſures of his Kingdom hereafter.

VI.

THE holy catholic Church, and the Communion of Saints, you know, my Brethren, are important Articles of

of our Chriſtian Profeſſion;—cheriſh, therefore, with great Care, that Liberality of Sentiment, that candid, benevolent, catholic Spirit which is the Glory of the Chriſtian Character, and the Fulfilling of the whole Law.

One principal End of our Lord's coming into the World, was to eſtabliſh Peace upon Earth, and Good-will amongſt Men[n]; and "that he ſhould gather together in one, the Children of GOD, that were ſcattered abroad[o];" to collect all righteous and good Men, of every Country, or Sect, or Party upon Earth into ONE catholic Church, ONE Family of Love, ONE Houſhold of Faith, in which they were ALL to worſhip and walk together in perfect Har-

[n] Luke ii. 14. [o] John xi. 52.

mony and Peace. As a ſtanding Emblem or Token of this intimate Relation to, and Connexion with each other, into which all Chriſtians are brought, they are commanded to eat and drink together at ONE SACRAMENTAL TABLE, in Remembrance of him their common LORD. In this religious Rite ALL ſincere Chriſtians are conſidered, however diſtant in Place, as eating at the SAME TABLE; as partaking ALL of the SAME BREAD, and drinking ALL of the SAME CUP; as having ALL, by the SAME SPIRIT, been baptized into the ONE BODY, or Church of JESUS CHRIST; and as having been ALL made to drink into ONE SPIRIT, with ALL other their Fellow-Chriſtians, as well as with CHRIST their Head [p].

[p] 1 Cor. xii. 11, 12, 13.

Hence,

Hence, then, it clearly follows, that no Chriſtian has a right to reject any other his Fellow-Chriſtian from partaking with him at the Lord's Table, on Account of any Difference of Sentiment in Things not fundamental, his moral Character being ſuch as the Goſpel requires.

It is a COMMUNION, or common TABLE, at which all the LORD's Servants, however differing in Rank, in Gifts, in Office, in Cuſtoms and Forms, in Sentiments and Opinions, are to EAT AND REJOICE TOGETHER; declaring themſelves, by this religious Rite, to be ALL united in ONE COMMON BODY, and ALL to be members one of another [q].—"The CUP of BLESSING which we bleſs, is it not the COMMUNION of the BLOOD of CHRIST?

[q] Rom. xii. 5.

The BREAD which we BREAK, is it not the COMMUNION of the BODY of CHRIST?" Is it not intended to repreſent our JOINT-PARTICIPATION in all the immenſe Bleſſings procured for us by his meritorious Sufferings on the Croſs? To be eaten and drank by ALL ſincere Chriſtians as a Token or Sign that they ALL belong to the one Body, or Church, of JESUS CHRIST. "For we, being many, are one Bread, and one Body; for we are all Partakers of THAT ONE BREAD[r]." And this Sacrament is a ſacred Pledge, a Document, a Memorial of "that Peace of GOD, that Harmony and mutual Love, which is to rule in the Hearts of ALL ſincere

[r] 1 Cor. x. 17.

Chriſtians,

Chriſtians, to which they are called in ONE BODY [s]."

Thus admirably calculated is the Inſtitution of our Lord to cauſe ALL ſincere Chriſtians to coaleſce and unite in one happy Brotherhood; to baniſh all bitter Strifes and Contentions from among them; and to calm the direful Animoſities which have ſo long been the Diſgrace, and, had not divine Providence mercifully interpoſed, would long ere now have been the Ruin of the Church. It commands us "to receive one another; but not to doubtful Diſputations [t]:" Amidſt Diverſity of Sentiment, religiouſly to maintain "an Unity of Spirit in the Bond of

[s] Col. iii. 15. [t] Rom. xiv. 1.

Peace [u]." It very ſolemnly forbids us to cenſure, to deſpiſe, or to grieve one another, on account of any Difference in controverted Points; yea, it not only permits, but commands every Man to read and judge for himſelf; to prove his own Work, as he ſhall bear his own Burden [w]; and, in a Way of ſevere Reprehenſion aſks, "Who art thou that judgeſt another Man's Servant? to his own Maſter only he ſtands or falls [x]. And why doſt thou judge thy Brother; why cenſure and ſet at nought thy Brother? muſt we not all ſtand at the Judgment-Seat of CHRIST?"

Whilſt our Brethren of the Eſtabliſhment, and many of our Diſſenting Churches, fence round their SACRAMENTAL TABLE with Terms and

[u] Epheſ. iv. 3. [w] Gal. vi. 4, 5.
[x] Rom. xii. 1–4, 5, 10.

Condi-

Conditions and Forms and Rites which CHRIST never preſcribed, and reject us from HIS TABLE, unleſs beſides what HE enjoins, we ſubmit alſo to ſome Injunctions and Requirements of their own—we think ourſelves not treated with either the Candour or the Juſtice which our Relation to them as Fellow-Servants, and to CHRIST as our common Lord, give us a Right to demand. We remonſtrate and complain, that our chriſtian Liberty is invaded; that a dangerous and undue Power is uſurped in the Church; its CATHOLICISM deſtroyed, and an unhappy Breach made in the COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

YOUR CHURCHES, my Brethren, to your Honour be it mentioned, are founded upon a more liberal, upon

the ſcriptural, apoſtolic Plan. You lay your Communion open to every ſincere Chriſtian, to whatever Denomination or Party he belongs; whatever his peculiar Notions or Speculations may be as to doubtful and diſputed Matters; if you have Reaſon to believe he is an honeſt and ſincere, however miſtaken Man, you receive him, as you are commanded, "but not to doubtful Diſputations[y];" and give him this Pledge of your Affection and Eſteem, that you will conſider and behave towards him as a Fellow-Servant and Chriſtian Brother.

There muſt be Hereſies, Sects and Diviſions, in the chriſtian Church, the Scriptures have told us, "that they who are approved may be made

[y] Rom. xiv. 1, 5.

manifeſt"

manifeſt[z]"—that Men of ſubſtantial Goodneſs, Men of Candour and Moderation, Men truly poſſeſſed of the Wiſdom from above, may have an Opportunity of ſhewing it, by the Meekneſs, Condeſcenſion, and Charity of their Deportment to thoſe who differ from them. Laying aſide, therefore, all Pride and undue Love of ourſelves, let us remember—that we are all fallible—that the wiſeſt and moſt knowing of us "know but in part, and propheſy but in part[a]"—that if any Man thinketh he knoweth any Thing, that is, if he prides himſelf in his Knowledge; if he is conceited, dogmatical, impatient of Contradiction; if he cenſures and deſpiſes others who modeſtly differ from him; that Man, we may be

[z] 1 Cor. xi. 18, 19. [a] 1 Cor. xiii. 9.

aſſured,

aſſured, is an ignorant and empty Boaſter; he knows not himſelf; and, if he be a Chriſtian at all, he is one of the loweſt Rank; "he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know[b]."

Let no Man "think of himſelf more highly than he ought to think[c];" —let us modeſtly preſume, that others may have read, and prayed, and ſearched the ſacred Scriptures with as much Diligence and Care, and perhaps may have been favoured with greater Light and Grace from Heaven than ourſelves;—that Chriſtianity is a Doctrine according to Godlineſs;—that the "Kingdom of GOD, genuine and true Religion, conſiſts not in Meats and Drinks; not in Ceremonies and Rites; not in

[b] 1 Cor. viii. 2. [c] Rom. xii. 3.

dark,

dark, myſterious, intricate Controverſies, in which wiſe and good Men have taken different Sides, but in Righteouſneſs, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghoſt [d]: in living ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in the World [e]; and that he that in theſe Things ſerveth Chriſt, is accepted of GOD, and approved of Men;" and ought joyfully to be received to the Communion of Saints.

If there be then, Brethren, any Communion betwixt the glorious, triumphant, united Church in Heaven, and this militant, divided, diſtracted Church on Earth;—if they have any Knowledge of our State, or concern themſelves in the Proſperity of CHRIST's Kingdom in the World, as without Queſtion they do; what

[d] Rom. xiv. 17—19. [e] Tit. ii. 12.

Pleaſure

Pleaſure muſt it give theſe benevolent Spirits, to ſee all the ſeveral Sects and Parties of Chriſtians laying aſide their mutual Strifes and angry Contentions, and receiving one another at THIS TABLE of their common Lord, and embracing, like themſelves, in Arms of mutual Delight? It will "cauſe Joy in Heaven amongſt the Angels of GOD[f]," if, aboliſhing theſe Diviſions, which have been ſo long and ſo deep a Diſgrace to Chriſtianity, and ſo injurious to ourſelves, we return to that generous, catholic, benevolent Spirit, which is the true Glory of our Nature, and the brighteſt Image of GOD upon it; and as a Token of this unfeigned Friendſhip, we EAT AND DRINK AS BRETHREN, at the ONE TABLE, which, partly, for this

[f] Luke xv. 7, 10.

very

very End he hath ſpread in his Church, and rejoice together in Love.

The heavenly Hoſt, at ſuch a Sight, would again ſtrike their golden Harps, and ſing, "Glory to GOD on high! on Earth Peace! and Good-Will amongſt Men[g]!" Let us hear them, as if addreſſing us in the Words of one of that bright Aſſembly—"If there be any Conſolation in CHRIST, if any Comfort of Love, if any Fellowſhip of the Spirit, if any Bowels of Mercy, fulfil ye our Joy, by being like-minded, of one Accord, of one Mind. Let nothing be done through Strife, or Vain-Glory, but in Lowlineſs of Mind, let each eſteem other better than themſelves[h]. Walk worthy of the

[g] Luke ii. 14. [h] Philip. ii. 1, 2, 3.

Vocation

Vocation wherewith ye are called, in all Lowlineſs and Meekneſs, with Long-Suffering, forbearing one another in Love. Endeavouring, σπουδάζοντες, earneſtly ſtriving, to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace [i]."

Remember what ſolemn Charges our Lord gave to his Diſciples, and what earneſt Supplications he offered up to GOD, that all who believed in him, and made Profeſſion of his Religion, "ſhould love one another, that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they alſo may be one in us, that the world may know that thou haſt ſent me; and that THEY MAY BE ONE, EVEN AS WE ARE ONE [k]."

[i] Eph. iv. 1, 2, 3. [k] John xvii. 21, 22.

Let

Let us ſeriouſly conſider the Nature of Chriſtianity, and the Deſign and Conſtitution of the chriſtian Church, which was to gather together all honeſt and good Minds, all ſincere Lovers of Righteouſneſs and Truth, wherever ſcattered abroad, into one bleſſed Community; not only into a ſacred Connexion with one another, but into a "Fellowſhip with the FATHER, and with his Son JESUS CHRIST *." Thus the Apoſtle illuſtrates this Matter. "There is one Body and one Spirit, which animates that Body, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptiſm, of the Spirit, which is imparted to every ſincere Chriſtian, one GOD and Father of all, who is above all, and through

* 1 John i. 3.

all,

all, and in you all[1]." And, ſuffer me to repeat it, as a Symbol of this Unity, and as a Mean of promoting it, you are commanded to eat and drink together, as at ONE SACRAMENTAL TABLE, in Token that you are ALL Children of ONE Family, Members of ONE Body, Heirs together of ONE bleſſed and glorious Inheritance, to which you are ALL travelling, and where you hope to live together in eternal Harmony and Peace.—Receive one another, therefore, to this ſacred Communion, and render the Church on Earth as much like to that in Heaven, as the preſent Imperfection of our Nature will admit.

The Concluſion which ſeems plainly to follow from all is, that

[1] Eph. iv. 5.

for

for one Party or Sect of Chriſtians to ſet up a SACRAMENTAL TABLE in the Church of CHRIST, in Separation from all other Chriſtians, and in Excluſion of all ſuch as will not conform to ſuch particular Modes, or Doctrines, or Rites as themſelves have deviſed, but which CHRIST hath not injoined, and hereby to reject thoſe from their Communion, whom, at the ſame Time, they believe to be CHRIST's accepted Servants, is a criminal Violation of the COMMUNION OF SAINTS, a raſh and preſumptuous Breach of the UNITY OF THE CHURCH, and a wounding the myſtical Body of CHRIST. The Table they THUS erect, is ſo far NOT THE LORD'S TABLE, but a Table of THEIR OWN; and as far as they THUS EAT, in criminal

Separation from, and uncharitably excluding all other acknowledged Chriſtians, who will not ſubmit to their unſcriptural Terms; they ſo far eat not the LORD'S SUPPER, but a Supper of THEIR OWN, and have no Reaſon to expect his Preſence and Bleſſing on the ſolemn Rites they perform.

AND now, my Brethren, having thus, at your Requeſt, performed this laſt public Act of my paſtoral Relation, by recalling to your Minds ſome of the grand Objects which it infinitely concerns us to keep continually in View; permit me to beſeech, and even conjure your moſt ſerious Attention to them; and that you make them the Subject of your

frequent Recollection in your Paſſage through Life.

The Time, you ſee, is ſhort; Life is but a Vapour which paſſeth haſtily away; ETERNITY is at Hand; Death will ſoon ſeparate us, and break up the moſt large and flouriſhing Societies; but that Separation will be but ſhort; we ſhall all live, and meet, and ſee each other again, around the Throne of that JESUS whoſe Goſpel hath been preached to you; and according to the Reception you have given it, and the Improvement you have made under it in ſubſtantial Piety and Virtue, in Love to GOD, and Benevolence to Men, our meeting at that grand Solemnity will be either joyful or dreadful, crowned with immortal Honours, or covered

with Shame and everlaſting Contempt[m]: When every Diſguiſe will be ſtript off, and every Character and every Action ſhewn in its true Light; every Man weighed in GOD's righteous and impartial Balance; and to every Man ſhall be rendered according to his Works[n].

GOD in his infinite Mercy grant, that not one Soul of thoſe to whom we now miniſter this Goſpel of Salvation, may be found to have received this ineſtimable Grace in vain[o]; for to ſuch it will prove a Miniſtration of Condemnation, a Savour of Death unto Death; that is, a complicated Death[p]. As it aggravates

[m] Dan. xii. 2, 3. Rev. xxii. 12.
[n] Matt. xvi. 27.
[o] 2 Cor. vi. 1.
[p] 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

their

their Guilt, it will alſo their Puniſhment. For better had it been, never to have known the Way of Righteouſneſs, than after we have known, to turn away from it, and to run wilfully into the Paths of Senſuality and Sin, which infallibly lead down to Shame and eternal Death [q].

But we hope better Things of you, my Brethren, though we thus ſpeak; even Things that will iſſue in your everlaſting Safety and Peace [r].

And O how tranſporting the Joy, if we, who have often met in theſe little Aſſemblies upon Earth, ſhall at laſt again meet in that great Aſſembly above, the Congregation of the Righteous, the innumerable Company of Angels and Saints, gathered

[q] 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. [r] Heb vi. 9.

out

out of every Kindred, and Tongue, and Nation upon Earth [s]; and ſhall there join their triumphant Song, aſcribing Bleſſing, and Honour, and Glory, and Power, to Him that ſitteth upon the Throne, and to the Lamb that was ſlain [t]; and with them be commanded to enter into the everlaſting Kingdom and Joy of the LORD [u].

That this may be the happy End of all our preſent LABOURS, and PRAYERS, and SACRAMENTS, and SABBATHS, may the Grace of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, through the powerful Operation and Influence of the Holy Spirit, mercifully effect! And may "the GOD of Peace, who

[s] Rev. vii. 9. [t] Rev. v. 12, 13.
[u] Matt. xxv. 21, 22.

brought

brought again from the dead our LORD JESUS, that great Shepherd of the Sheep, through the Blood of the everlasting Covenant, make us all perfect in every good Work, to do his Will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his Sight, through JESUS CHRIST[w]:" To Him be Glory in the Churches, throughout everlasting Ages. Amen.

[w] Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

FINIS.